

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

2. (Canceled)

3. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 28, in which two chronological serial numbers are computed by linear approximation on the basis of two series of successive item fingerprints, and a distance between the two computed chronological serial numbers is measured.

4. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 8, in which the search for a match is performed on the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass in an exploration space centered around the fingerprint associated with a computed chronological serial number.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 8, in which the chronological serial number is constituted by the juxtaposition of a sorting center number, of a sorting machine number, of a sorting outlet bin number, and of a chronological index corresponding to chronological order in which the items are loaded into the sorting outlet bins.

7. (Canceled)

8. (Currently Amended) A method of processing postal items, which method comprises the following steps during a first pass for sorting the items:

 taking a digital picture of a postal item,
 deriving from said picture a digital fingerprint which is a logic identifier for the item, and storing the fingerprint of the item in a memory in correspondence with data about the item, and

the method comprises the following steps during a second pass for sorting the items:

 taking again a digital picture of a current mail item,
 deriving from said image a digital fingerprint for the current item, and
 searching the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass for a match with the fingerprint of the current item in order to retrieve the data about the item by association in order to sort the current item, if no match is found the current item is rejected,
sorting a current item by directing it toward a sorting outlet provided with sorting
outlet bins if said match is obtained, and
rejecting the current item by sending it to a reject outlet if no match is found,

wherein said method further comprises during the first sorting pass:

 associating in the memory the fingerprints of the successive items with corresponding chronological serial numbers, chronological order being the order in which the items are loaded into the sorting outlet bins and

during the second sorting pass, the method further comprises :

recording data relative to matching obtained between fingerprints from second sorting pass fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass, retrieving, for a series of successive item fingerprints which number equal to a certain threshold and for which matches have been obtained with fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass, a series of chronological serial numbers associated with said matching fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass, computing an estimated chronological serial number for a current item by means of a linear approximation from said series of chronological serial numbers, and searching for a match with the fingerprint of the current item on the basis of the estimated chronological serial number to limit exploration space for matching fingerprints, and

during the second sorting pass, if no series of successive item fingerprints matching with fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass can be obtained for a number of successive item fingerprints equal to said certain threshold, the method comprises :

scanning, in full, fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass until a match is found with the fingerprint of the current item is obtained, and if no match is obtained the current item is sent to a reject outlet
sending current item to a reject outlet if no match is obtained.

9. (New) A method according to claim 8, in which a first chronological serial number is computed on the basis of a series of successive item fingerprints for which a number of successive items in second sorting pass equal to said threshold is in the same chronological order

as in the first sorting pass, a second chronological serial number is computed by linear approximation on the basis of a series of successive last item fingerprints equal to a certain threshold for which matches have been obtained with fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass, and a distance between the first and second computed chronological serial numbers is measured to compute an estimated chronological serial number for a current item.

10. (New) A method according to claim 8, in which said certain threshold is equal to five.

11. (New) A method according to claim 8, in which said certain threshold is $1/20^{\text{th}}$ of the storage capacity of a sorting outlet bin.